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Green, J. W.

How to manage a boot &
shoe department

Manchester

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HOW TO MANAGE A BOOT & SHOE DEPARTMENT.

A PAMPHLET

FOR THE USE OF SMALL SOCIETIES PROPOSING TO
ENTER ON THE ABOVE BUSINESS.

I.—BY J. W. GREEN,

OF CLAYTON, YORKSHIRE.

II.—BY A. E. H. WEBB,

OF PLYMOUTH.

ISSUED BY THE CO-OPERATIVE UNION LIMITED COOPERATION STREET,
MANCHESTER.

The Management of a Boot and Shoe Department.

I.—By J. W. GREEN.

THE success of any venture in co-operation must, of necessity, depend to a great extent on the manager engaged to conduct the business. However a committee may plan and foster a given branch, or however staunch the members are in making all their purchases there, if the manager is careless or negligent, wanting in tact or push, and does not thoroughly understand the business he is engaged to manage, there will not be that increasing development and extension that marks the progress of a well-conducted business. Co-operative committees ought to always bear in mind that to be honest by their members, they must be able to compete with, and be able to sell, as good an article at as low a price as the private tradesmen in the district. Capital, as a rule, being plentiful in co-operation, we can dismiss that with the understanding that it is already provided, and give our first attention to the choosing of a manager. For a small society it is of imperative necessity that we have a really practical man, seeing that he will have to do the bulk of the work by his own hands. He should be able to make hand-sewn, pegged, or riveted boots, understand the use of the elastic machine, and be able to undertake every description of boot repairing. He also should have had some experience in buying leather, and other materials, with a knowledge of both price and quality. He must have experience in cutting leather, or else he will not be able to use the different qualities found in one hide to advantage, which will entail both waste and loss. The more practical all-round knowledge your manager possesses, the better prospects of success you will have. Having chosen a manager, the question of remuneration of services arises. A large society can afford to pay this out of the profits, because they have a large turnover, and the manager's services will be entirely taken up in the sale department and overlooking the workshop. But a small society having a little turnover, the manager must of necessity fill up his time in

making and repairing, which will make part of his wage a productive one, the other part, of necessity, coming out of the profits. There are different ways of accomplishing a settlement of wage-paying. One is to pay a weekly wage, which varies in different districts. An average will be 25s. or 28s. for small societies, or you might pay so much—say 8s. or 10s. per week—for attention to sale and stock, and piecework for making and mending, or commission on takings and piecework. Then there is no disputing about the man earning his wage, and if he be a good man at his trade it will encourage him to do his work promptly, which is necessary to success in this branch. The next question for our consideration will be our shops. Taking first the sale shop, however small the society may be, it is always better to have the sale in practical hands. I now refer to the practice of the boot-selling being combined with the drapery departments, which I distinctly condemn as bad in practice and theory. I suppose it is done on the score of economy; if so, it is a delusion. What can a draper know about boots? Suppose he is able to buy through the facility offered at the Co-operative Wholesale, where he is certain of honest value, he does not know how to keep his stock in condition when he has got it. If you want proof of this, look over the stock where it is in practical hands, and over the stock in a draper's hands. You will find the stock of the bootmaker is always kept fresh and in good condition, while that of the draper is shop-worn and has an old-stock sort of look about it, which causes it to lose its value before there is any need. Again, a bootmaker concentrates his attention on this one stock, and his window makes it a speciality, the consequence is, greater sales and better satisfaction in fit and comfort to his customers, the bootmaker being better able to advise what is best, under different circumstances, having made this his special study. If the bootmaker fills up his time in the workshop, the sale of boots need not cost more per cent than under the combination system. I think larger returns and better satisfaction would amply pay for the space and light that would be required extra. I should certainly have a sale shop neatly fitted with a good air-tight show-window, which need not cost many pounds. I should say that £10 would fit up a small shop nicely—neatness is the greatest consideration. The manager might set off his window to advantage, without many fittings, with a little ingenuity. The more you let the public see of your stock, in a tastefully arranged window, the greater will be your sales; this often tempting non-members to become purchasers, which is often the means of leading them to become members. Having decided to have a sale shop, next comes the question of stock, which will vary in style according to district,

and must be chosen to suit each locality; my advice is to buy in small quantities at the commencement, and only to re-stock those boots that sell best, increasing your stock as you find which sort are in pretty constant demand. You might buy say, £50 worth, adding as your requirements develop and your trade increases, taking care not to get your stock too bulky to be quickly turned over. Of course larger societies will need to buy in larger quantities—from £200 and upwards—according to the number of members. Now comes the furnishing of the workshop, which will require a seat and bench, costing £2 or £3, according to size, also one set of iron lasts, which run 6's to 10's for men's, 2's to 5's boys', 2's to 7's ladies', 11's to 1's and 7's to 10's children's, costing either 14s. or 21s. per cwt. Then, in wood lasts, two sets of men's will be required, one of which must be for heavy work, the other for lighter work; also one set of ladies', for making ladies' boots on, costing, at the Co-operative Wholesale, tenpence for ladies', and elevenpence for men's, per pair. An elastic machine will be required for sewing repairs and putting in elastics. Larger societies will require, in addition, machinery, such as a press for cutting soles and heels, rollers for rolling leather instead of hammering, and knives with which to cut soles and heels. Machinery would cost (new) £20 to £30 and upwards, and would be really necessary for large societies wishing to compete with private tradesmen and keep up with the times. Then would be wanted a supply of leather, nails, and sundries. For a small society £30 would buy a few months' supply.

Finally comes an estimate of the cost of working the department on the whole. Suppose a small society's takings amount to £10 per week, and is working on a 20 per cent profit, which is the usual custom, we should have 40s. per week as profit, which would divide, more or less, as follows:—25s. per week as 2s. 6d. in the £2 bonus on members' purchases, 7s. per week manager's commission on takings, 5s. per week for rent and taxes, 3s. per week as interest on £150 capital invested. I have taken as a basis societies with from 200 to 400 members, and if the business is well managed the takings will very likely average more than stated. More trade done and larger the profits. Thus, if expenses are calculated on taking £10 per week, any takings over that increase the profits to be disposed of. Let your material and stock be good and reasonable in price, then success is certain.

II.—By A. E. H. WEBB.

IT is essential to the well-being of a small society that the opening of new branches of business shall take place cautiously and by degrees. There is nothing that will tend to disparage a society of small means and limited resources more than for its members to rush into new departments before they have made their present ones at least fairly successful. At the same time, it must also be borne in mind that if a body of members desire to augment their number and to add to their utility they must not rest content to remain in one groove or keep to one department, but should exert themselves to develop their business, and thus confer benefits on all concerned.

One of the best paying and most advantageous branches (if properly worked) to be taken up by a small co-operative society is the boot and shoe business; but to bring about the much desired objects, viz., success and satisfaction both so far as regards quality and also profit, it is absolutely necessary to evince due care and caution at the commencement, for it is quite possible that this may have a most important bearing upon the future of the branch. The old proverb, "Well begun is half done," is most applicable in this case, for if the right start is made half the difficulty is got over and the road to prosperity made much easier.

In the first place, it is essential that due precaution should be taken to keep down the expenses of fitting up a department of this kind to a minimum, and it is therefore desirable that, if possible, a portion of the grocery store should be set aside for the purpose, and if there was sufficient room to spare a part of the shop window could be also utilised for the display of the goods.

Having secured the necessary space, the next thing is to procure the person to take charge, and here again the services of the shop assistant can be obtained. A few days', or even hours', training would suffice for the purpose of obtaining an insight into the business, and also to get sufficient knowledge to be able to take measures for bespoke work. Practice would make perfect, and thus so far the expenses would be very little.

Having procured the necessary space and assistance, the third step is to get together the stock; and here lies the root of the whole matter, for if good sense and judgment are shown in the selection of the goods it will very materially add to the success of the undertaking. If, on the other hand, reckless buying and overstocking are indulged in, the department will very soon come to grief and possibly seriously affect

the stability of the society. Therefore great care must be taken—first, to secure only those goods which are likely to be the most saleable; and secondly, to be moderate with your orders, bearing in mind that you can always increase your stock of saleable articles, whereas, on the other hand, by buying and having on hand varieties of goods which do not sell, you will be expending your capital, and having so much dead stock from quarter to quarter depreciating in value, and therefore not worth the money it originally cost.

Of course a hard and fast line cannot be laid down as to what particular goods are best suited to commence business with. The people of each district will be the best judges of that which will suit their requirements; but it will be generally found that goods of medium size and value will be the most saleable, always avoiding the cheapest (which are generally the dearest in the end), and also being very chary of indulging in the more expensive kinds until you are confident they can be sold.

Having obtained your space, assistant, and goods, the fourth requisite is a workman for hand-sewn goods and repairs, and here again care must be taken, because if your man be a good mechanic and can also do a neat job at repairs, he will materially increase the income and consequently add to the profits. So far as the wages of the workman are concerned, the best plan to adopt would be to pay him by the piece or job, adding so much per cent as was thought fair to meet the necessary expenses and secure a good dividend to the members.

With regard to the important matter of buying and knowing where to buy by far the best and safest course to pursue is for a society to place itself in the hands of the Wholesale, giving particulars of the kind of goods likely to be required, together with what is thought to be the most saleable sizes. Always avoid fancy goods of whatever make or kind until there is a demand for them, when they can easily be obtained from the manufactory and the requirements of the members satisfied. It is extremely probable that a good business will be done in the bespoke or hand-sewn line, and due care and attention must be given to secure a good fit; but accidents will occasionally happen and mistakes occur, therefore it is necessary to add a trifle extra to this kind of goods, to meet the chance of having misfits and probably having to part with them at a loss.

Another point that should not be lost sight of is, that care should be taken to secure the goods to the purchaser on the date when promised. Many private firms make it a rule to promise articles by a certain date, knowing full well when they speak that the promise is a false one. There is nothing calculated to sour customers so much as to

find that after calling at the desired time they are told in a very polite manner, "Not done, please call to-morrow;" and possibly they call two or three times before the desired article is forthcoming. It is therefore necessary to allow a reasonable length of time to elapse for the purpose of having an opportunity of getting the work completed by the specified time. A further point to be considered is relative to competition by tradesmen. This matter should really affect co-operative societies very little. The great point to be borne in mind is that the first duty should be to secure the genuine article, then sell at the fair price, and thus receive the real and legitimate profit.

Again, every precaution should be taken to reduce or write off goods that have from some cause or other depreciated in value. If this is not done the value of the stock at the end of the quarter, as shown in the balance sheet, is not a real one, and may possibly be the cause of a deal of trouble which could have been avoided if the right policy had been adopted at the commencement.

With respect to the cost of working in a small society having already established a grocery branch, it would be very little. The cost of distribution would not exceed $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent on the sales, then add another 6 per cent for rent, repairs, general expenses, reduction of fixed stock, &c., and you have a total of 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. On the other hand 20 per cent should be made on all repairs and goods sold, which would thus leave a clear balance of 12 $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent as profit.

It will be thus seen that a department of this kind can be made to answer successfully, if, in the first place, the expenses are kept down as low as possible; secondly, providing a suitable person can be found to take a genuine interest in the work; and thirdly, if the proper selection of goods be obtained to suit the general requirements of the members, and as the business grew and the trade developed other and more important steps could be taken to open a branch complete in itself, and to engage the services of an assistant altogether; but this course should not be adopted until a trade of at least £25 per week was being done.

A branch of this kind can therefore be worked at very little extra cost, if so desired, to that already incurred. Always commence at the foot of the ladder, and by degrees work upwards. It is far better to do this than to start in a most elaborate manner, and have to wait weary and long for your customers, and finally to climb down and wish you had started in a more humble way. Bear in mind the motto that "nothing succeeds like success," but to obtain this it is essential to give quality, profit, and politeness.

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